

CODEL DICKS

**Trip Report/Notes by
Congresswoman Marcy Kaptur
March 1, 2007**

**Turkey, Pakistan, Afghanistan,
Kuwait, Iraq, Germany**

19-26 February 2007

Members of Congress:

- Norm Dicks, D- WA
- Rodney Frelinghuysen, R- NJ
- Marcy Kaptur, D-OH
- Steve Rothman, D-NJ
- Chris Carney, D-PA
- Patrick Murphy, D-PA

Trip Report/Notes by Congresswoman Marcy Kaptur March 1, 2007

CODEL DICKS

19-26 February 2007

Turkey-Pakistan-Afghanistan-Kuwait-Iraq-Germany

Logged over 14,000 miles; 42 hours in air

Members of Congress: Norm Dicks, D- WA, Rodney Frelinghuysen, R- NJ, Marcy Kaptur, D-OH, Steve Rothman, D-NJ, Chris Carney, D-PA and Patrick Murphy, D-PA

Major Observations:

Our journey took place during a period when there is a growing mistrust between Muslims and the West which reaches far beyond Iraq. The Bush Administration believes that a successful military victory in Iraq will result in a “successful state” that will turn around the perception of the U.S. across the Muslim world. Opponents to that position hold that the war in Iraq is building greater animosity toward the U.S. and Western institutions, and a serious correction is needed to resolve the war in Iraq before it triggers more terrorism, regional instability, and animosity toward the U.S. During our journey, these points of view were expressed by those who called the War in Iraq a “Noble Chance” to those who observed the U.S. engagement was like “using a chain saw to cut butter.” Several Generals made references to the idea that victory is 1/3 military and 2/3 good governance, the latter utterly missing.

General Petraeus noted that the authority for multinational force under unified command in Iraq expires at the end of this year; December 31, 2007. He notes that this would be the opportune time to transition to a peacekeeping force. U.N. Resolution 1546 (June 8, 2004) extended the provisions of U.N. resolution 1511 (October 16, 2003). The relevant section:

10. the multinational force shall have the authority to take all necessary measures to contribute to the maintenance of security and stability in Iraq in accordance with the letters annexed to this resolution expressing, inter alia, the Iraqi request for the continued presence of the multinational force and setting out its tasks, including by preventing and deterring terrorism, so that, inter alia, the United Nations can fulfill its role in assisting the Iraqi people as outlined in paragraph seven above and the Iraqi people can implement freely and without intimidation the timetable and programme for the political process and benefit from reconstruction and rehabilitation activities;

Major concerns that I wish to address:

1. **Diplomatic Vacuum Across the Region:** There is an almost total lack of diplomatic effort by Bush Administration to enlist support of neighboring nations to Iraq (Turkey, Syria, Jordan, Kuwait, Iran, and the U.N.) to strengthen alliances with each other and

with the government of Iraq to quell violence and stabilize the nation. Though this “Neighbors of Iraq” platform has been advanced, it has not been used effectively by Secretary Rice.

2. **Poorly Defined “Enemy:”** the definition of “enemy” has changed since the 2003 U.S. invasion. Al Qaeda is mentioned as problematic but not the main source of violence. Little information is provided to the Congress about those killed, detained, or involved in actions against U.S. and other forces in Iraq. An Army captain on his second deployment (2003 and 2007) stated during our trip: “The situation on the ground has changed from deposing Saddam and liberating Iraq, to conflict between Sunni and Shia.” Staff Sergeant Joseph Lopez, a soldier based in the Northern outskirts of the Capitol said in the Washington Post February 26, 2007 “I don’t know who I’m fighting most of the time. I don’t know who is setting what IED.”
3. **No Communication Strategy:** A well constructed communications campaign to influence Iraqi popular opinion, and augment the U.S. military war effort, **does not exist**. As a result, the U.S. is losing popularity across the Islamic region, and in some polls, that number is in very low single digits. This is exacerbated by the Iraq war.

A recent Gallup Poll in Muslim nations reveals in Pakistan, 73% of the population dislikes the U.S. In Saudi Arabia, the figure rises to 76%. The poll also revealed that the unpopularity is due to the perception that the U.S. is morally decadent, allows promiscuity, and is waging a war on Islam that was highlighted by the abuses at Abu Gharaib and Gitmo.

Favorable Opinions of the U.S.

	1999/ <u>2000</u>	<u>2002</u>	<u>2003</u>	<u>2004</u>	<u>2005</u>	<u>2006</u>
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Great Britain	83	75	70	58	55	56
France	62	63	43	37	43	39
Germany	78	61	45	38	41	37
Spain	50	--	38	–	41	23
Russia	37	61	36	47	52	43
Indonesia	75	61	15	–	38	30
Egypt	--	--	--	–	--	30
Pakistan	23	10	13	21	23	27
Jordan	--	25	1	5	21	15
Turkey	52	30	15	30	23	12
Nigeria	46	--	61	–	--	62
Japan	77	72	--	–	--	63
India	--	54	--	–	71	56
China	--	--	--	–	42	47

1999/2000 survey trends provided by the Office of
Research, U.S. Department of State

A BBC international opinion poll taken in January 2007 shows widespread concern over America's role in Iraq and its foreign policy. Out of the 25 countries where the poll was taken, opinion of America had fallen in 18. The poll questioned US handling of Iraq, Guantanamo, the Israel-Hezbollah war, Iran's nuclear program, global warming and North Korea's nuclear program. Opinion of the US had fallen on every issue.

General Odierno commented: The majority Iraq's population wants the U.S. out, but just not now." He stated that in the last week, a person was killed and dismembered by the Iraqis. However, on that evening's news **U.S. forces** were blamed for the death. He then showed two ads the U.S. military produced to begin reaching Iraqis to breach the serious divide in perceptions (98% of Iraqis have access to satellite TV). The ads drove home the courage average Iraqis must demonstrate to reject the terrorist enemy and establish a better way of life. He explained that these two ads were placed on commercial television, but admitted that they comprised a very, very small part of what Iraqis see on daily television.

4. **The latest escalation of U.S. troops is already underway.** We were told that it will be complete by March 15-30. Two brigades are in theater, with others rotating through Kuwait as we visited.

Major Recommendation:

Benchmark Indicators: It is fair to ask the Bush Administration how the American people will know how and when we are winning the so-called Global War on Terror. Many Westerners say victory will come when the Islamic world rejects radicalism. However, recent Gallup polls show more Islamic people who define themselves as “radicals” support the Western ideal of democratic government (50%) than those who define themselves as moderates (35%).

Congress should use the upcoming FY07 War Supplemental Appropriations bill to benchmark these indicators. The President should be required to certify and report back monthly. The benchmarks should go beyond structures of this Supplemental bill’s measurements (such as readiness) to embrace a broader strategy of necessary steps to win back the hearts and minds of people across the Islamic world.

Suggested benchmarks to list over period of war:

- # daily attacks
- # displaced persons
- # troops contributed by each nation in “Coalition of the Willing” over period of war
- Oil production
- Oil legislation
- Gasoline prices and amount imported and exported
- Electricity
- Inflation
- Ratio of foreign fighters to U.S. forces: from which nations; compensation and benefit levels
- In attacks inside Iraq, a more complete explanation of which interest group was responsible as opposed to saying “insurgent”
- Measures of numbers of Iraqi Army and Iraqi Police with professionalism ratings
- Diplomatic efforts by the Bush Administration to engage nations adjacent to Iraq in a “Neighbors of Iraq” diplomatic offensive
- # contractors in Iraq, performing which functions, at what total cost for what compensation for each quarter the U.S. has been at war
- Progress of Iraqi government anti-deBaathification
- Estimate of number of madrassas in Iraq and adjoining nations that must be countered, their location, and funding source.
- Other “Measures of progress” of Iraq government demonstrating its willingness to govern – accountability in contracting.

Individual Country Reports

February 23-24

Iraq

Meetings with **Generals Odierno/Petraeus:**

“Sectarian violence can bring Iraq down. Our job: to control it.”

It is in mixed neighborhoods where we have trouble.

Mission: secure provinces, giving resources to them, but in the end, to secure Sunni-Shia relations. Once you reach a tipping point of security in a neighborhood, the people go with you.

Our troops will be going out with the Iraqi forces to give people confidence. Presently, 70% of the Iraqi Army is sectarian, as are 50% of the police. The Constitution gives power to the provinces, giving them resources to develop their communities; this is mildly encouraging. In Al Anbar, tribes are opposing Al Qaeda. The U.S. government is the “connect” between Al Anbar province and the Iraqi government. The discovery of oil there may help too. There are 18% Sunni left in Iraq. Three areas in Baghdad were problematic (Gazaria, Rashid, and An Nil)

x Gazaria x An Nil

O Baghdad

x Rashid

The Sunni decision not to participate in the elections was quite harmful. The bombing of the Samarra (Sunni) mosque was disastrous. It unleashed Sunni/Shia violence and dynamically changed the situation. The current endeavor will take months, not days. The majority of Iraqis want us to leave, but not until they feel secure.

There are Sadr brigades in the police. Maliki is going after them.

In December, the U.N. Security Council Resolution ends and that would be a good time to transition to a peacekeeping mission.

In terms of stability, the Shia in the South are OK, though there is some internal fighting. Kirkuk is touchy.

There are huge gaps between the government of Iraq and the Iraqi people. We are trying to fill that gap militarily, economically, and politically.

The number of murders and executions is down due to the displacement of populations and division into ethnic/sectarian groups. Our plan is to further bring down the violence.

At Camp Taji, our delegation met with General Wolff who is in charge of training the Iraqi Security Forces. **He stated “our biggest problem is the lack of leadership, and the institutions to teach the military.”** His objective is to teach/mentor Iraqi security forces both police and the military in a “Multinational Security Transition Command.” His goal is to increase Iraqi responsibility from 325,000 to 362,000 troops. To date, there are 136,000 troops. In the Iraqi Security Force, the Prime Minister asked for 90,000 more police. They are made up of 70% Shia, 20% Sunni, and 10% Kurd. We intend to dispatch 2,700 uparmored Humvees to the Iraqis. His goal is to increase from 900 to 2,900 airmen; from 1,100 to 2,000 Navy; and from 135,000 to 138,000 police.

Last June, the defense and policing functions were taken over by the Iraqi government. But there is no discipline in the system. To stand on its own will take more than a year. As with the Saudi’s our goal is to “span and bridge.” The budget for Defense is \$1.5 billion and for the Interior ministry \$169 million dollars.

In Baghdad, our delegation met with General Fil, 1st Cavalry from Ft. Hood Texas (comprised of Guard and Reserve Members). He pointed out their brigades may be extended. They are not sure as they have been in theatre for three months and are to finish in June.

Their mission is “full spectrum operations” with Iraqi Security Forces to secure Baghdad and to create conditions for governance. Their work is to promote the legitimacy of the Iraqi political system. The end state will be near Iraqi control in Baghdad, Najaf, Karbala, Babil. Iraqi Security forces are important in the Baghdad Security Plan with participation in tactical to operational responsibilities. **It will be a tough fight.**

The government of Iraq must increase its capability to compete with the militias, insurgents, and terrorists marginalized by reduced popular support. The Army and National Police don’t get along but when Coalition forces are with them, they change for the better. We intend to create 41 outposts as Joint Command Stations. Last week, a huge car bomb hit one station north of Taji in Tarmyia, but we will install security in the future. Al Qaeda is the worst part-- they want people to lose faith in Iraq’s ability to govern. A success story occurred in Najaf. 700 Messianic Shia rose up and tried to disrupt pilgrims. Our forces were called and we assisted in eliminating the problem.

Meeting with Executive Agencies: AID, Justice, Political Counselor Ambassador Margaret Scobey, Reconstruction, Justice, etc

The agencies were quick to point out that **cumulatively** their budgets equaled what one brigade costs the Department of Defense. They acknowledged their limitations.

Ambassador Scobey stated that the “Baghdad Plan” would buy time for the workout of political problems: e.g., Iraq is not dealing artfully with de-Baathification. Generals Casey, Petraeus, and Abizaid all said **you can’t resolve Iraq militarily, but political emphasis is needed.** The Baghdad Plan is not just about the military, but about services and economic development.

On electric, the group offered that the problem is the transmission lines keep getting pulled down. Insurgents literally wrap chains around the base of the transmission lines, pull them down, and sell the metal. In addition, 56 people in the Electricity Administration have been assassinated.

In a bizarre episode, the former electricity minister, an Iraqi American named Ayham al-Samaraie from Chicago, was jailed on corruption charges and then sprung from a Green Zone prison by U.S. security contractors (Dyncorps) he had hired.

For gas/oil, consumers face huge lines. But the real problem is that the 46" pipeline that runs from Kirkuk, the richest field, to the refinery at Beiji is being blown up regularly. Therefore, trucks have to truck the oil to Beiji. Predictably, there are attacks on the trucks, sabotage, and oil smuggling. They estimate Iraq is losing \$30 million a day. Ambassador Scobey said this problem with the refinery has been known for three years and the group has now heard that the 4th division is coming in to fix it. She asked, almost begged, how Congress can require **“this government to be made to demonstrate to Congress its willingness to govern!?”**

For example, on 8 February 2007, Iraq's government passed \$41 billion in funds for capital projects (last year they executed \$21 billion). Unfortunately, they spent all the administrative and salary funds, but not the capital project money. It will be important for the projects to use only so much for administration (e.g. 10% to ministries). Those devising projects should use the Ministry of Planning for Assistance. Allocating contracts will have to be done professionally. If by June 1, such a plan is not in place, the government should require provinces to lose the funds and funds should be reallocated.

The Context in Which the War is Being Waged

Recent Gallup polling found the following:

What Muslims admire most about the U.S. and the West:

- emphasis on family and the future
- western ideal of democratic government (50% Of radicals supported democracy while only 35% of moderates did)
- liberty
- technology
- freedom of speech

What Muslims dislike about the U.S.:

- condemnatory of promiscuity
- moral decay

There is widespread support for Shariah law, but only a minority support religious leaders making laws. Women face an apparent contradiction: they simultaneously embrace the veil, Shariah, and equal rights.

	US Lives Lost-Cumulative	US Injuries - Cumulative
2003	486	2,408
2004	1,334 (848)	10,408 (8,000)
2005	2,180 (846)	16,354 (5,946)
2006	3,003 (823)	22,736 (6,382)
2007	3,159 (156)	23,417 (681)



180th Fighter Wing from Toledo, OH deployed in Baghdad





We were shown the variety of explosive devices that are being employed against our soldiers. The increasing size and sophistication of the devices, including triggering by infrared or even cell phones, shows adaptation of the enemy. Our forces are doing everything to meet the challenge to destroy/disarm these devices which have killed and injured so many thousands.

February 20, 2007
Ankara, Turkey

“A Muslim Country With a Democracy”

80 million people
98% Muslim Sunni

U.S. Ambassador Ross Wilson expressed that **Turkey-U.S. relations are headed for a rocky time.** Despite rising nationalism, Turkey contributed over \$100 million to the Afghanistan operation which has been helpful. However, the U.S. apprehended Turkish Special Operations Forces in Iraq and hooded them. It is not clear what the Turks were doing in Iraq. This coming May, a new President will be elected and by November a new Parliament. In 2002 the Islamist Party beat the old line secular leaders all over Turkey and they have delivered on their economic programs. The Secular party remains deeply unpopular. Then, in 2004, the AKP won all local elections too. Secular Turkey always governed from top down. Under the current system, the Turkish government selects the religious leaders (Imams) and disseminates religious doctrines through them. Turkey is nervous about possible partition in Iraq due to the Kurds in the north. They fear U.S. withdrawal in Iraq will mean more influence of Iran in Turkey.

Three issues affect U.S. Turkish relations. (1) The Presence in Northern Iraq of the PKK, a revolutionary group that seeks to create a Kurdish state and has killed over 30,000 citizens in Turkey. They target tourist sites. (2) Kirkuk in Iraq, and its place in that nation's future, is of concern as it lies just outside the Kurdish area of Iraq.

There is a referendum scheduled in 20078 and huge oil deposits are at stake. In Turkey is a NATO-member nation. Its internal politics are being affected by a major debate of “secularism”- centered in the military with its roots in the secular state founded by Ataturk after the first world war, and fundamentalism—centered in the government agencies—and arising from popular interpretations of Islam.

Our meetings in this nation's capital involved the U.S. Ambassador Ross Wilson and U.S. Major General Peter Sutton of the Office of Defense Cooperation. In addition, our delegation met with Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Affairs Minister Abdullah Gul who reaffirmed the proven 50-year alliance of Turkey with the U.S.

He pointed out turkey lost 1,000 soldiers in Korea, and also has troops in Kosovo and Bosnia. Turkey has deployed 1,000 troops to Afghanistan and has treated 650,000 people in hospitals there and is assisting 44 schools with 35,000 students, including girls. 90% of U.S. rotations occur through turkey. 4,000 trucks per day serve Iraq. Turkey has lost 250 drivers.

He said Saddam Hussein's demise is a lesson to leaders in the region. He thought securing Baghdad was a good strategy. **He advised that the ambiguities in the Iraqi Constitution were causing people to fight for their future.** He urged a speed up in the work of Iraq's Constitutional Review committee to address issues such as Kirkuk, and reintegration into the Army of former Baathist Party sympathizers. **He offered that Turkey can help in the training of the Iraqi Army.** He urged the U.S. not to leave immediately. He strongly urged support of the “Neighbors of Iraq” platform—Iran Syrian, Jordan, turkey, Kuwait—to come together to discuss

how to help Iraq stabilize. The U.N. is also participating. This platform has not been used the U.S. Secretary Rice may be considering it

He discussed the importance of the Baku/Tblisi oil pipeline from the Caucasus to the Mediterranean Sea. (see maps). He commented that the Armenian Resolution introduced in the U.S. Congress as counterproductive, expressing as an alternative the establishment of an international “Joint Commission” to assemble scholars from the U.S., France, Armenia, Turkey and other places to research the records. The event in question occurred in 1915 during the Ottoman Empire. The current Turkish government does not believe it was “genocide” because Armenians were part of the government structure itself, e.g. serving as Ambassador to France and as Foreign Minister. Turkey suffered the loss of over 3 million people in the Balkans during World War I and many families were affected. However, in order to move forward on this issue, the President of Turkey wrote the President of Armenia last year on this subject. No reply has been received as yet.

Our delegation met over dinner at the home of the U.S. Ambassador with several members of the Turkish Parliament. They asked: “How does the U.S. define success in Iraq?” They expressed the concern that Iraq has moved from a few Al Qaeda members to a training ground for terrorists.

They asked why the Baker Hamilton report was not adopted by the U.S. Congress. They pointed out that report stated relative to Iraq that:

- (1) no military solution was possible in Iraq, only a political solution.
- (2) For the U.S. to leave, it should seek assistance from neighboring countries including the European Union and even the U.N.
- (3) If the U.S. doesn’t declare clearly when it will withdraw from Iraq, other countries won’t cooperate.**

Arriving at how and when to withdraw, the U.S. should reinvigorate the “Neighbors of Iraq” initiative and use the framework developed by the U.S. Institute for Peace. Our delegation proposed the idea of embarking upon a televideo conference between Members of Congress and the Turkish Parliament to further discuss the Iraq situation and a road forward. This idea was warmly received. Upon returning to Washington, our delegation is working with Congressman Rob Wexler of Florida to expedite this first session.

February 21 Afghanistan

Our delegation met first with Commanding General Dan McNeil, NATO International Security and Assistance Force. He began his briefing with a PBS film about the **Return of the Taliban** and handed out a briefing paper on same. He stated we are engaged in a counterinsurgency effort against primarily Taliban, reformers, and insurgents and that the Taliban had been created by the Pakistani Intelligence Service. He posed the question can we win the counterinsurgency without winning in the tribal areas between Pakistan and Afghanistan? He said we can't do it without the Pakistani government cooperation. He stated NATO will not go into the tribal areas. Our Special Forces are there but Pakistan won't allow our troops to move freely. He said we need more NATO troops here as it is the #1 priority BUT Germany, for example, is putting more forces in the Balkans than Afghanistan. In Afghanistan we're headed for a 75,000 Afghan army, headed by a Tajik loyal to his country. We also met e commanding general responsible for training the Afghan security forces and the Afghan Defense Minister.

We also met with Afghan President Hamad Karzai who reinforced expectation of the government that a Taliban surge would occur in the spring, and the importance of engaging Pakistan to quell the terrorist sympathizers. He had begun to make contacts with the government of Pakistan, after a long lull.

February 21-22

Islamabad, Pakistan

Pakistan, with 165 million people, is on track to be the 4th largest nation in the world by 2020. It ranks as the poorest country in the world *outside of Yemen in Africa*. We arrived in what was described as “in the grip of a nationwide security scare.” The U.S. is viewed more negatively as mullahs spread information that the U.S. efforts are a “War on Islam.” Recent Gallup polls show the U.S. is disliked by 65% of the Pakistani population. The U.S. is also viewed as a “fair weather” friend. Al Qaeda and the Taliban are attacking Americans. A few weeks ago, the “Save the Children” office was attacked with grenades as the climate for NGO’s worsens. The U.S. Embassy, Canadian and Australian compounds are barricaded, barbed-wired and set off in inaccessible locations.

The day we departed, 24 February 2007, a suicide bomber team was blown to pieces when their bike laden with explosives hit a bump and exploded in the central province of Punjab. Both bombers were students of a nearby madrassa (religious school) suspected of links to banned Sunni militant groups with ties to Al Qaeda.

We were briefed by Peter Boddle, Charge d’Affaires for the U.S. Embassy. He began by saying that the Chinook helicopter has become a symbol for kids in Pakistan due to the U.S. relief efforts after the earthquake. There are 200,000 public schools in need of attention and teacher training remains very important. U.S. AID spends about \$400 million dollars a year in Pakistan, of which \$60 million is on faculty training and \$40 million on basic education focused on 9,000 schools in the Sindh and Baluchistan provinces in the South. The focus of AID has shifted since the 1980’s when the priorities were agriculture and energy. Today, the priorities are good governance, education, health, and earthquake assistance. No one has an accurate figure on the number of madrassas in Pakistan. It could be up to 30,000; funded for over a decade by the Wahabbi Sunni sect from Saudi Arabia, in which so many young zealots are indoctrinated. U.S. AID was not even present in Pakistan during the 1990’s following the Afghan war. It did not restart its activities until 2002. We were referred to the website of the Pakistan Center for Philanthropy which discusses key contributions of Pakistani Americans in aiding Pakistan.

The Pakistani Finance/Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz informed us there was an attempt on his life in July and two attempts on the life of the Pakistani President Pervez Musharaff. Minister Aziz was internationalist in his view but lacking in the empathy about their condition that would likely appeal to Pakistan’s populace so in need of charismatic leadership. He spoke about global investment in Pakistan – Unilever, McDonald’s, Kentucky Fried Chicken, GE, and Asian firms – as essential to bringing employment. But only on questioning did he discuss the poverty challenges to his nation, in fact stating that only 25% of Pakistanis are listed in the lowest poverty category and then they were close to the threshold. Aziz, a former top executive of Citicorp, returned to Pakistan in 2002, after having been gone from the nation for a quarter century. He served most recently as the CEO of the Saudi American Bank and Global Head of

Private Banking for Citigroup. He also served as Executive President of Citibank in 1992, now based in Dubai, United Arab Emirates.

General Ahsan Saleem Hyat, Army Vice Chief of Staff since 2004 also narrowly escaped an assassination attempt in June 2004. He blamed it on Al Qaeda. He was appointed by President Musharaff ahead of four more senior Army officers. His explanation of the challenges facing Pakistan and the region was realistic, informative, and sobering. His characterization of the unrest fomented by groups in the tribal lands (FATA – Federally Administered Tribal Areas) between Afghanistan and Pakistan, and what it would take to counter it, was comprehensive. He demonstrated a deep knowledge of the tribal and ethnic cultures and sensitivities necessary to meet the challenge. I invited him to work with our delegation to arrange a teleconference where Members of our subcommittee could dialogue with him further. He was open to that.

Tribal areas are divided into 7 sectors. The Taliban use these areas to regroup and rearm. In fact, some mosques collect money to aid insurgents through Quetta border crossing not closed by Pakistan.



The Federally Administered Tribal Areas of NW Pakistan are made up of seven "Agencies":

1. Khyber
2. Kurram
3. Bajaur
4. Mohmand
5. Orakzai
6. North Waziristan; and
7. South Waziristan



February 24
Kuwait City, Kuwait

From the air, Kuwait's terrain looks like dusty cardboard.....with desert sand blowing, dunes piling up, with occasional Bedouins camping with their colorful pigeon tubs centered behind their makeshift, dismal shacks. Cutting through the endless sands, as far as the eye can see, are miles of huge electric transmission towers heading toward the oil fields, the nation's singular economic reason for being. At the sound of our helicopter's blades, lumbering camels below shift into high gear running to the edge of our sound. Kuwait looks somewhat hazy as talcum-like desert sand coats everything—windows, clothing, equipment. The air here is far from pure and is polluted with waves of burn off from the oil fields. It catches in your throat and nose. You can smell it everywhere.

It was raining in Kuwait, with huge lightning bolts, as we arrived at Camp Arifjan, the major staging base for U.S. operations in Iraq. Beige, desert mud greeted every step we took. Our delegation visited with the Third Army CFLCC (Combined Force Logistics Central Command) and was treated to a film with World War II clips and Patton's voice in the background, reminding soldiers that the Third Army is always first, whether in Iraq or World War II Europe. We viewed the massive base that accommodated equipment, barracks, supplies, up-armored HUMVEE facility, staging areas, and Central Command that measured 10 football fields by 10 football fields in size. We learned about Central Command's responsibilities in the vast region stretching from Egypt to Kazakhstan. The magnitude of this operation, and the dedication of all those in service to our military, is extraordinary. The memory I will hold is meeting brave, serious, dedicated young soldiers (ages 19-21) staging to deploy in up-armored HUMVEES into

Iraq. They demonstrated the new 300 lb. door and gun turret and shared with me ideas for further manipulations.

As we prepared to depart Kuwait City, I chatted with a remarkably gifted and patriotic soldier (*photo in front of street sign*), Army Captain Jeremy Ebdrup, earner of the Bronze Star, who was serving in his second tour of duty in Iraq. He spoke about his wife and children back home. His convoy had been ambushed in Ramadi. He observed how the situation on ground had changed since the start of the war as religious Sunni and Shia clashed. In his efforts, he found weapons caches and was able to help a family assist their burned child. This man is a soldier's soldier and an example of American's finest.



February 25

Ramstein, Germany

Colonel Angela Thompson, Commander of the 435th Medical group met us on our arrival at the Ramstein Air Base. We headed to the Landstuhl Regional Medical Center where all soldiers from the Iraqi and Afghani theatres are treated. 91% of soldiers survive their wounds. There are daily flights from Iraq and Afghanistan to Ramstein, and then three weekly flights back to the U.S. from Ramstein.

We were joined by General McKiernan, USAREUR Commander who visited many patients with us in the critical care wing, as did US Air Force Commander General Hobbins and his wife Robbin. On average, 300 wounded come to this facility each month. We enjoyed meeting with many recovering soldiers in the USO community room on site. One of them, from Greenville, Ohio, shouted how unreliable the Iraqi police were and not to trust them. He was very agitated and was recovering from a triple hernia operation.

We then went upstairs to offer comfort to the critically wounded. Every soldier wanted to tell us their story. One had lost both feet in an IED bomb blast. Another, whose wife had flown in to be with him, had been burned badly by an IED and was very swollen. He was to be flown to the Army's burn unit in San Antonio, Texas for follow up treatment. Another soldier was struck by the fact that he was the only soldier left from his convoy as all others had died in a bomb blast. He described to me how he tried to save the life of his buddy by applying a tourniquet to his thigh as the leg had been blown off. His buddy died and this young man was criticizing himself for not putting the tourniquet on tighter. I told him he did all he could do and he should be proud for trying so hard. Another soldier, being attended to by several medical doctors and nurses, was paralyzed and unable to speak. He was from Ohio, in fact, my district, and I know his family. We prayed together.

I was deeply impressed by the care of the medical staff, and their deep concern for each soldier. They were exemplary. For each one of them, this was not a job, but a vocation. Imagine being the first person many of these soldiers recognize after being wounded and transported out of theater. Truly, they are doing God's work.

